

Family-School Compacts





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Acknowledgments

Angie Avila
Child Nutrition Office

Edda Caraballo-Browne
High School Academic Support

Wade Brynelson
Learning Support and Partnerships
Division

Carlos Gomez
Child, Youth, and Family Services
Branch

Rona Gordon
Fiscal Administrative Services

Mary Lu Graham
Family and Community Partnerships
Office

Velma Hall
Healthy Start Office

Jane Henderson
Child, Youth, and Family Services
Branch

Georgianne Knight
Special Education

Karen Lowrey
School Safety and Violence
Prevention Unit

Carol Monroe
Family and Community Partnerships
Office

Emily Nahat
Child, Youth, and Family Services
Branch

Maria Reyes, Principal Writer
Family and Community Partnerships
Office

Mary Rountree
Elementary Instructional Resources
Networks

Susan Thompson
Family and Community Partnerships
Office.

Introduction

The Challenge calls for us all—students, parents, educators, and communities—to embrace a simple but powerful concept: that we measure success by gains in student achievement based on standards.

—Delaine Eastin
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

This guide provides information to Challenge school districts and other school districts and schools interested in using family-school compacts as a means of encouraging a closer working partnership between schools and families. The information is also useful to schools and districts that receive funds under the Improving America's Schools Act, Title I. The new Title I mandates strengthen parental involvement and require the implementation of family-school compacts. Compacts are jointly developed agreements between the home and the school that describe how each partner will help students to meet the school's challenging standards and goals. Although the terms *family* and *parent* are used throughout this document, they refer to any caregiver who assumes responsibility for nurturing and caring for children, including grandparents, teen parents, aunts, uncles, foster parents, stepparents, and so forth.

The first section of the guide—"Responsibilities for Implementation of Family-School Compacts"—stipulates the basic responsibilities of Challenge school districts and the California Department of Education (CDE) in implementing family-school compacts. The second section—"Development of Family-School Compacts"—recommends specific ways in which teachers, parents, administrators, and students can work together to develop compacts that support student learning and describe how all the parties will contribute to the students' success in school. This section answers basic questions about family-school com-

pacts; suggests a process for jointly adopting compacts with families at a school site; and contains supplemental materials, including a bibliography and samples of family-school compacts, to aid in the implementation of family-school compacts and family-involvement efforts.

Research shows that students do best in school when families are involved in advocating for and supporting their children's education both at home and at school. Likewise, student performance improves when schools reach out to families to establish partnerships and assist families with ideas and avenues for supporting their children's education at home and at school. Family-school compacts are a tool that schools and districts can use to encourage a closer working partnership between schools and families.

Compacts are voluntary agreements between the home and school that describe specific activities that teachers, families, administrators, and students will undertake to support the student's learning. Families are not obligated to sign or agree to participate in family-school compacts. Compacts are most effective if they have been developed jointly with all the parties to the compact and are reflective of the local priorities for student learning. Families may agree to participate with their children in home activities that research findings suggest can help their children the most, including talking daily about school and everyday events, monitoring the amount and quality of TV viewing, and completion of homework. Participation by families in school-centered events such as parent-teacher conferences, Open House, Back-to-School Night, a student's extracurricular activities, and school decision-making teams, are examples of ways they can directly support student achievement in school. The Family-School Partnership Act, a state law passed in 1994 (AB 2590, Chapter 1290), allows parents to take up to 40 hours off from work during the school year to participate in these and other school activities.

The success of compacts depends on the extent to which many school staff and families believe in the concept and ultimately use and adhere to the shared responsibilities for students' education outlined in the agreement. Many alternative schools, such as charter, magnet, and specialized program schools, successfully use compacts as a concrete way to engage families, welcome them as partners, and formalize the important role that families play in the education of their children by requiring families to spend a specified number of hours participating in their children's education.

In general, compacts will be successful to the extent that schools reach out and show their commitment to work together with families in support of students. Families overwhelmingly want to be involved but often do not know how to help. Family-school compacts can be an effective tool and opportunity for schools to demonstrate a concrete commitment to family-school partnerships.